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Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral and Rectory



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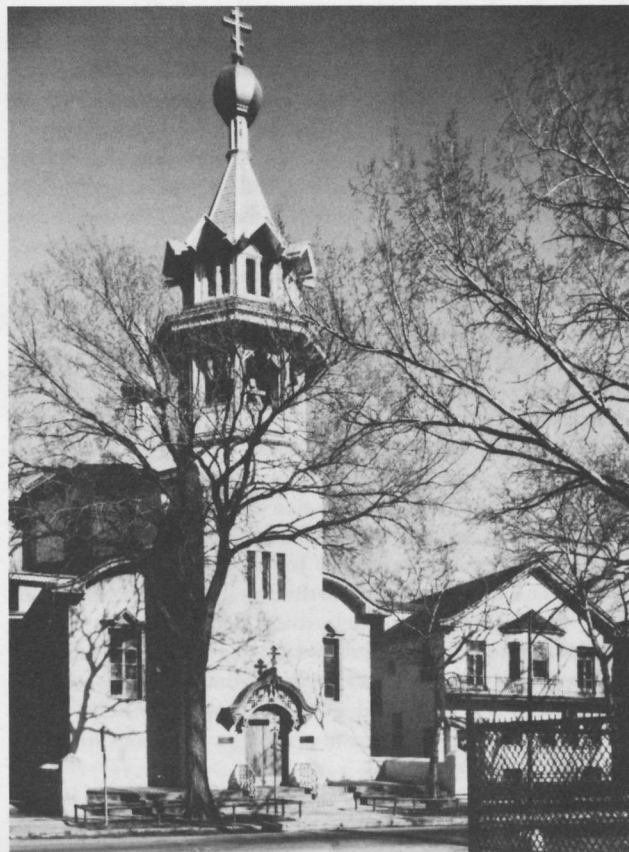
320 North Clark Street

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(312) 744-3200

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Commission on Chicago
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A recent photograph of Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral and the rectory.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)

HOLY TRINITY ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL AND RECTORY

1121 North Leavitt Street

Louis H. Sullivan, architect

Completed in 1903

The picturesque church at 1121 North Leavitt Street reflects the unique character of both its religious heritage and its architect. Designed by Louis Henri Sullivan, Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral was built by Chicago's Orthodox community. The Orthodox religious tradition is one of the oldest in Christianity. Identified with it is a style of church architecture derived from that of the Byzantine empire with various East European vernacular modifications. Louis Sullivan, himself obsessed with the idea of creating an American vernacular architecture, had developed a personal philosophy which, although not based on any particular religious tradition, was well suited for this project. The ideologies held by client and architect harmonized beautifully, producing one of Sullivan's most inspired small-scale works, a church of which the Orthodox community of Chicago, and particularly its then Russian majority, could be justly proud.

Staff for this production

Suzan von Lengerke Kehoe, *writer and designer*

Janice Van Dyke, *production assistant*

As the Russian Orthodox community of Chicago grew through an influx of immigrants during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, many members of that community felt the need for a permanent place to worship. At the request of Bishop Nicholas, the Orthodox Bishop of America, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia provided initial funding to the Chicago congregation, following in spirit the Russian tradition of state-subsidized churches. The decision to build was given impetus by the example of the Streator, Illinois congregation which had built a monumental church in 1894. The Streator church incorporated portions of the Russian display from the World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893. After the display was dismantled, the ornamental entranceways were presented to the Streator congregation by the Tsar. The Russian display at the fair was designed by Ivan Ropot, a leader of the Slavic revival in Russia. It was much admired and fostered a spirit of nationalism within Chicago's Russian Orthodox community, creating a strong desire for a Russian-style church.

In 1896, an architect named John Clifford began drawing plans for a church for the Orthodox congregation which was led by Father John Kochurov. Clifford's plans called for a grandiose church, following the tradition of the monumental city churches of St. Petersburg and Moscow in Russia. The plans generated publicity and were helpful in gaining financial support from several prominent Chicago-

ans; however, the plans were never implemented. Father Kochurov's parishioners were generally not from the metropolitan centers of Russia; they were from Byelorussia, the Ukraine, and the Carpathian mountains, country people whose churches were usually simple wooden structures. Father Kochurov understood their humble backgrounds and showed wisdom in his final choice of an architect. By 1900, Louis Sullivan had replaced Clifford and immediately set to work designing a church and rectory for the newly chosen site at the southeast corner of Leavitt Street and Haddon Avenue. The final design was completed in 1901.

Louis Sullivan

Sullivan's name probably had been recommended by Charles R. Crane, who had travelled extensively in Russia, or Harold McCormick, both of whom were financial supporters of the church. Although most of Sullivan's earlier designs had been for large commercial structures, he ably produced a small-scale design which recognized the financial limitations and liturgical requirements of the congregation and was appropriate to the rural backgrounds of the congregation. Sullivan's design reflected his early career as well as a thoughtful study of Russian church architecture.

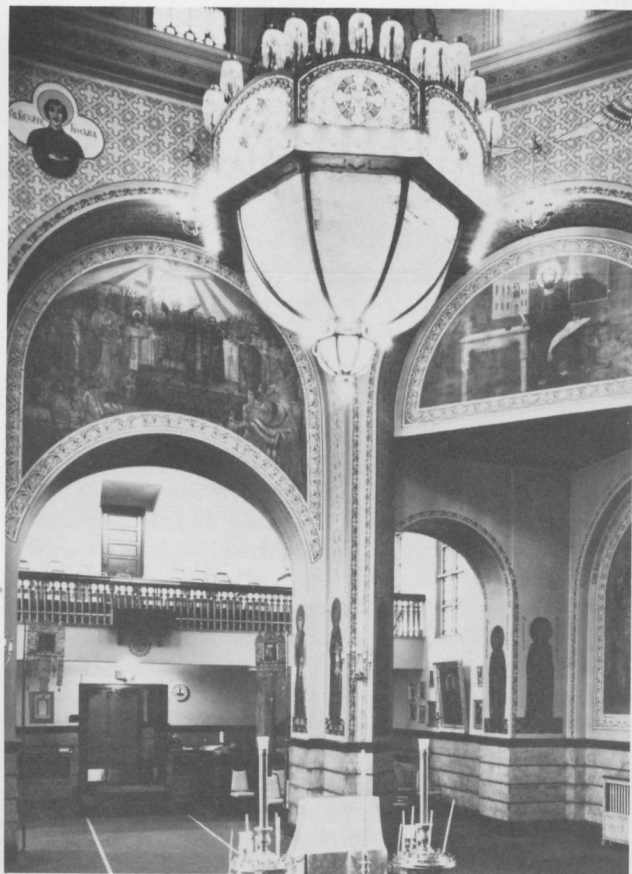
Louis Henri Sullivan was born in Boston in 1856. He attended school there and his walks through Boston's streets inspired him to become an architect. Sullivan spent much of his youth, when not in school, on his grandparents' farm in nearby South Reading where he acquired a deep and lasting love of nature. In 1872, he entered the architectural school at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He remained there only one year, however, before leaving for Philadelphia to work in an architectural office. There he was employed by Frank Furness whose style greatly influenced the young student. It was in Furness's office that Sullivan was introduced to Gothic Revival, a picturesque architecture that had an effect on the development of Sullivan's own style.

A year later, a financial depression forced Sullivan to leave Philadelphia. He traveled to Chicago intending only to visit his parents who had moved to the city earlier. He found a job as a draftsman with architect William Le Baron Jenney and decided to stay for a few months. Although only briefly in the employ of Jenney, Sullivan was influenced by his work. When Sullivan entered the office in 1873, Jenney had been working in a version of the Gothic Revival which he believed would lead Americans to a new indigenous architecture. Many of Jenney's small-scale commissions had a decidedly picturesque quality. Sullivan's ideas about decoration, influenced by Furness' work, were further refined in Jenney's office. Here he also absorbed Jenney's functional approach to design which would later characterize much of both architects' work, making them pioneers in the development of a truly American style in the next decades.

After a few months of working, Sullivan returned to his studies, attending the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* in Paris in 1874. Dissatisfied with the school's emphasis on historical

The interior of Holy Trinity reflects the Russian tradition of religious art, seen here in the nave. The inner narthex is visible through the archways.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)



styles, he returned to Chicago in 1875 and worked with various architects, including the firm of Johnston and Edelman. John Edelman greatly influenced Sullivan's ornamental style and philosophy.

In 1879, Sullivan joined the office of Dankmar Adler, and three years later the two men formed a partnership. Adler was a practical engineer with a business mind. Sullivan was a philosophical and imaginative designer. Working together, they comprised one of the most successful and prolific firms in Chicago. For thirteen years, Adler and Sullivan maintained a high volume of commissions, designing many large commercial structures. However, the economic panic of 1893, coinciding with resurgence of the popularity of historical styles in the years after the Columbian Exposition, led to a reduced number of commissions. Adler and Sullivan dissolved their partnership in 1895. Sullivan continued to work on the few small commissions he was able to secure. He now had time to put his architectural principles into writing, and he wrote several books on the subject. Most of his theories had been formulated by an early age. His love of nature and his early training were evident in his quest to unite structural technique, function, and ornamentation in a manner appropriate to the time and surroundings. Sullivan's ingenuity and creativity made him an excellent choice as the architect of Holy Trinity. His sensitivity particularly appealed to Father Kochurov, and the two men worked closely together and became friends.

The crisp decorative work on the belfry shows Sullivan's eye for detail.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)



It is in the exterior details of Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral that Sullivan's unmistakable genius for ornament is most evident. The interlacing design of the ornament in the canopy over the entranceway is similar to stencilwork done by Sullivan for other projects. It also is reminiscent of decorative motifs found in Viollet-le-Duc's history of Russian architecture.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)

Holy Trinity

Sullivan's design for Holy Trinity reflects his research, probably including the work of the popular French critic, Viollet-le-Duc, *L'Art russe, ses origines, ses elements constitutifs, son apogee, son avenir*; his own design sense, a metamorphosis of earlier impressions; and the assistance given him by Russian-born Father Kochurov.

Viollet-le-Duc's book on the history of Russian architecture was a well-known source of information. The book contained illustrations, descriptions, and general specifications for Russian church architecture. Le-Duc described the qualities that govern Russian architecture as "elegance, not without boldness; the attentive study of the effect of the masses; a discreet ornamentation that is never powerful enough to destroy the principal lines and leaves repose for the eye." These qualities are realized in the design of Holy Trinity in which the spatial units are beautifully massed, the bell tower is tall and regal, the silhouette of the roofline is sinuous, and Sullivan's distinctive and refined ornament is restricted to the doorway, the bell tower, the windows, and the underside of the eaves.

The plan for the church and rectory showed Sullivan's functional approach and his inclination toward the picturesque. The final form of the church fulfilled the needs of the parish and met the restrictions of religious traditions and limited finances.

Unlike most Western Christian services, in which the presiding figure stands before the congregation and conducts the service, portions of the Eastern Orthodox liturgy take place much like theater-in-the-round. In the nave, the



This 1906 photograph shows the close relationship between the design of the church and the rectory.
(Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society)

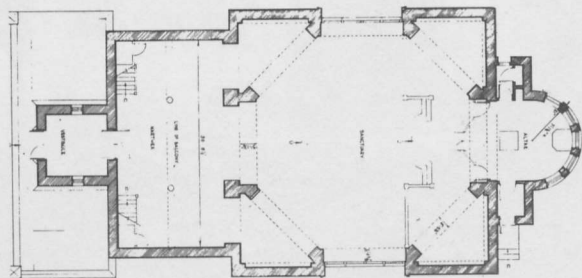
congregation often stands in a circle around the priest or bishop. An aura of mystery pervades the ceremony as the clergy are the only persons allowed access to the altar which is partially hidden from view by a screen called the iconostas. The Eucharist is brought from behind the iconostas to the congregation. Incense, many candles, and elaborate vestments accompany various parts of the ceremony adding to the mystery.

Sullivan's plan is similar to the Russian provincial churches with which Father Kochurov was familiar. The more complex of these churches took a form known as the "tent church," a term which derived from the shape of the broadly-based octagonal steeple-like structure over the main area of the church. Frequently, especially in the Ukraine, the octagonal sections which diminished in size would be stacked, one upon the other, on top of the

square body of the church. A small cupola terminates the sequence. In these Russian provincial churches, the bell tower was placed slightly to the west of the church. The bell tower itself repeated the octagonal configuration of the main body of the church. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, this type was also translated into masonry construction and it is from these sources, and particularly a photograph of a church erected in 1897 in Tatarskaya, Siberia, that Sullivan derived his design. Sullivan simplified these "octagon-on-square" plans into a unified whole, producing his own interpretation of the Russian tradition.

Holy Trinity is a small rectangular building, oriented along the traditional east-west axis. The entrance is through a square narthex, or vestibule, in the western bell tower. Following this is an inner narthex (*trapeznaya*) covered by a lateral tunnel vault. Within this area is a balcony supported by two Sullivanesque columns. The main body of the church, the nave, is square in shape with an inscribed octagonal dome. To the east is a raised area (the *solea*) which precedes the altar screen, the iconostas. Immediately behind this is the semi-circular sanctuary, flanked by two small rooms.

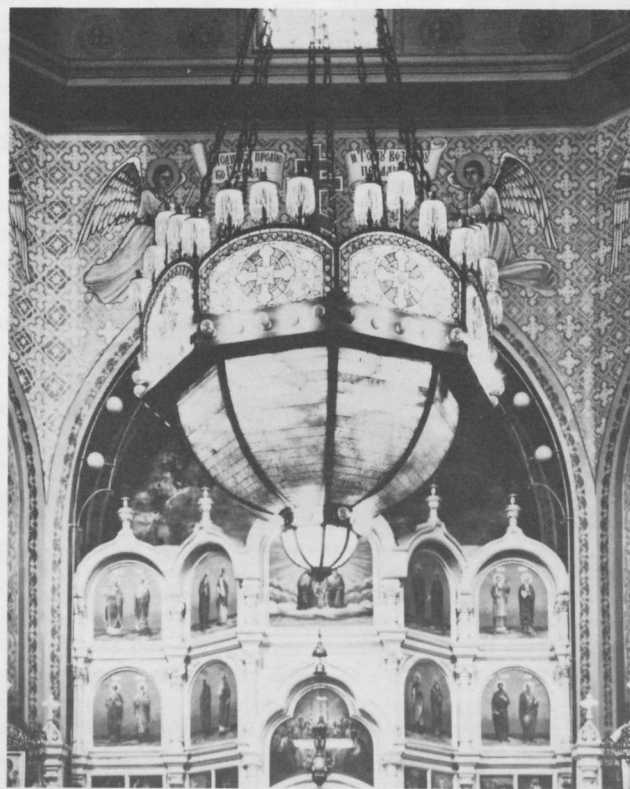
The plan chosen by Sullivan was among the oldest and purest within the Russian Byzantine legacy, a centralized plan deriving from the philosophies of the orthodox faith. The centrally-oriented building, symbolizing the kingdom of God on Earth, was meant to stimulate and facilitate interaction between the congregation and the clergy. Of the several central plans that evolved in Russian architecture, the octagon-domed type chosen by Sullivan is the most compact and directly reflects the interior spaces. Thus, it was closely allied with Sullivan's feeling that a building's form should reveal its function.



The floor plan of Holy Trinity. The entrance through the bell tower is at the far left of the drawing.

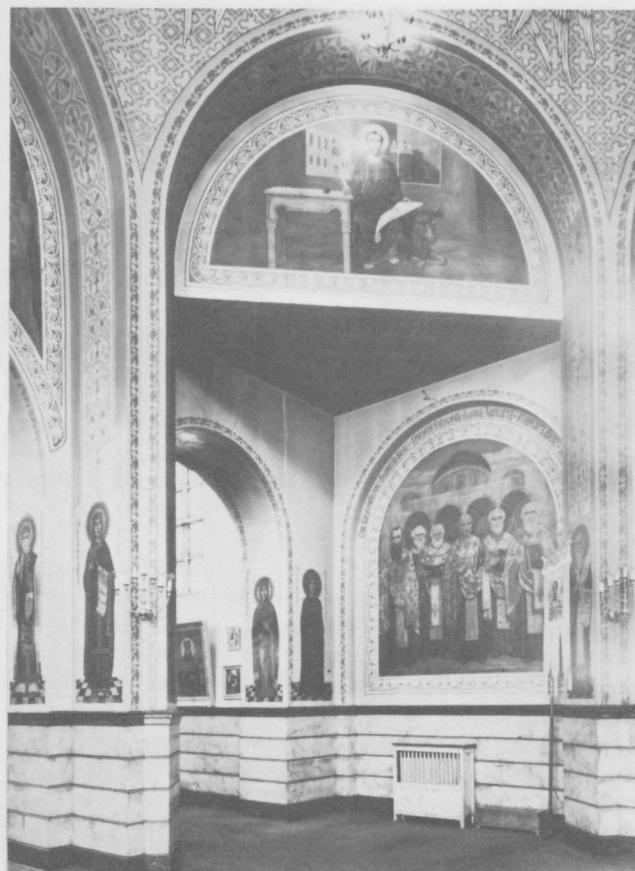
(Courtesy of Historic American Buildings Survey)

The walls of the church are load-bearing brick covered with stucco. The roof and the lattice work that partially covers the openings in the belfry are painted sheet metal and wood, as is the canopy over the entranceway. Under the canopy, an ogee-shaped arch, is a sheet metal grill with a decorative open-work design. The pointed deep-set windows, which are derived from the Tatarskaya church, are set into metal frames. The metal is pressed into crisp patterns in Sullivan's characteristic geometric ornament. A similar pattern is repeated under the eaves of the roof.



The interior of Holy Trinity is richly decorated with stencils and paintings of religious figures.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)





The ornate iconostas given to the church in 1912 by Charles R. Crane is at the center of the photograph. It is an important element in the Orthodox religion and a focal point of the interior decoration of the church.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)

The origin of the interior decoration has not yet been determined. Details similar to those on the exterior can be found within the ornament and it may have actually been designed by Sullivan and carried out under the direction of the church. The interior walls are lavishly decorated with stencilling and paintings. The decoration contributes to the overall impression of intimacy and mystery, further enhanced by the subtle lighting. The wainscot is painted to look like marble. At one time columns were painted at the bottoms of the arches which support the dome, but over the years individuals have contributed funds for painting icons in place of the columns. Stencilling and paintings of angels decorate the octagonal base of the dome. The dome is painted to represent the sky.

The original altar screen, which is now in St. Mary's Orthodox Church in Cornucopia, Wisconsin, was replaced in 1912 by a great iconostas imported from Russia and donated by Charles R. Crane. Crane had a strong interest in Russia, and he possessed a large collection of Russian art. The iconostas is composed of paintings depicting the life of Christ and icons of saints. Painted heavily with gold, it reflects the light emitted by the windows in the clerestory and casts a warm glow. The particular style of the Holy Trinity iconostas represents the Western influence in Russia in the mid-nineteenth century. The pictures are more Italianesque than traditionally Russian.

Other ecclesiastical art found in Holy Trinity shows the changes taking place in Russian art before the turn of the century. On either side of the narthex are two large murals, one depicting the Greek Fathers of the church, the other showing the Russian Fathers. These murals were copied from works found in St. Vladimir's Cathedral in Kiev, built between 1862 and 1896. The paintings were done under the artistic direction of V.M. Vasnetoff, a somewhat controversial figure in Russian history. In the interest of reviving what he believed to be the purest Russian Orthodox style, which originally was introduced to Russia from

Byzantium, he travelled, for inspiration, to the town of Ravenna in Italy, one of the provincial capitals of the Byzantine empire. The result in St. Vladimir's was a break with the medieval Russian tradition of static art to an unusual mixture of Eastern and Western traditions. This deviation was copied in Holy Trinity.

When Holy Trinity was built, the stucco was painted in several colors. Each part of the structure was painted a different color, ranging from ultramarine blue to bright red. The church has been stuccoed over once. It is currently painted white with yellow trim. As such, it conforms to the color scheme which appears in a perspective drawing made for Sullivan and now in the congregation's possession.

The two-story rectory to the south of the church is of the same construction as the church and is finished in the same manner. The detailing on the roofline of this simple structure repeats the sinuous curve found in the roofline of the church but in a more restrained manner.

Together, the buildings form a cohesive unit. Compactly designed, the church fulfills the needs of the Orthodox faith. Sullivan's creative genius can be seen in the simple yet graceful curves of the silhouette. Touches of his ornament accent but do not overwhelm the overall design. The interior gives way to the needs of a clearly-defined service and iconographic tradition. Sullivan understood the tradition well and designed a structure that fostered the intimacy required by the congregation. The design appealed

This view of Holy Trinity shows the detailing around the windows and roof line. The rectory appears at the right of the photograph.



aesthetically to both patron and architect. Sullivan felt deeply about the commission and was enthusiastic about his work and his relationship with the Russian community. He was so anxious that the church be completed as the parish envisioned that he returned half of his fee to the church in order that the decoration could be completed. He wrote in a letter that he hoped it would then become one of "the most unique and poetic buildings in the country." Even without the exterior polychromy, Sullivan's sincere wish has been fulfilled.

Cover design is from a photograph of a water color signed by Louis H. Sullivan.
(Courtesy of *Prairie School Review*)

The Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks was established in 1968 by city ordinance, and was given the responsibility of recommending to the City Council that specific landmarks be preserved and protected by law. The ordinance states that the Commission, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, can recommend any area, building, structure, work of art, or other object that has sufficient historical, community, or aesthetic value. Once the City Council acts on the Commission's recommendation and designates a Chicago Landmark, the ordinance provides for the preservation, protection, enhancement, rehabilitation, and perpetuation of that landmark. The Commission assists by carefully reviewing all applications for building permits pertaining to designated Chicago Landmarks. This insures that any proposed alteration does not detract from those qualities that caused the landmark to be designated.

The Commission makes its recommendations to the City Council only after extensive study. As part of this study, the Commission's staff prepare detailed documentation on each potential landmark. This public information brochure is a synopsis of various research materials compiled as part of the designation procedure.